

MEET THE 2013–2014 BIBLE STUDY WRITER



Kay Ward

IN GOOD COMPANY

by Kay Ward



IT'S a beautiful snowy morning in December, and the wood stove is purring with warmth. I have a cup of coffee at my side as I begin to write for the July/August issue. I have been thinking of this article since I started writing the Bible study earlier in 2012. I am so humbled in having been asked to undertake this exciting project for the Women of the ELCA. You have been in my mind all these months of writing. I have been "In Good Company."

Beginning in September, company's coming! I have invited nine women from the Old Testament, several from the New Testament, and a handful of women I know to stop in for a visit. They will be companions with us each month, long enough for us to get to know them and also to get to know ourselves a bit better.

Their stories will draw us into Bible study, invite us to worship with the Psalms, and give us opportunities to tell our own stories.

I knew about many of the Old Testament women before I began, but I didn't know their whole story. Now that I know them better, I have grown fond of each and every one of them. They have come to my house in my imagination, have helped themselves to a cup of coffee, and have taken a seat on my couch while I wrote. I will confess, some of them I did like better than others, but they were all interesting and eager to share their stories.

We grow in our faith as we read the stories of these women—not that we want to become like them but because they are like us, and we feel kinship with these

long-ago sisters. The women from the New Testament may be even more familiar to many of us but we learn something new from searching their heartaches and their faithful decisions.

The psalms of the Old Testament are the hymnal for the women we read about, so each month, we start with a psalm, using some new tools to make them more accessible. I have also included some contemporaries, women from my family and circle of friends. God continues to reveal truths to us through the women (and men) we meet along the way.

There has been a mystery in this project. I am a very linear kind of woman, and in the past, before I started to write, I wanted to see the whole project planned out, clear through to the end. (I am one of those people who actually *likes* to make outlines.)

This time, I made a list of the nine women we would study. Then I started to think about what order I would use to write about them, but I couldn't decide. I just knew that I needed to start with Hannah. As I finished up that first chapter, I was led to begin writing about Deborah. And so it went—with each chapter evolving from the last one. I kept being surprised. This isn't my usual style but as the chapters were completed, I began to enjoy the unknowing. Trust in such a project is a small thing but I grew from the experience. I did experience God at my right hand (and at my left) and my heart has been very glad to have been given this opportunity.

Our theme text is Psalm 16:8–9:

“I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.”

A Cup of Coffee (or Tea)

I have chosen to write each chapter as if I were speaking to each of you, personally. I imagine you joining Hannah or Deborah on the couch with your cup of coffee (or

tea). I have posed many questions for you to consider in each chapter. Sometimes those questions have right answers, but usually the question is meant to stimulate conversation rather than coming up with a correct answer. In my teaching, I have found that asking questions about a text is a terrific way to get at the meaning, faithfully.

When we ask questions about the biblical women, we are entering into a relationship with them. Though the years separate us, we get small glimpses of their lives, their thoughts, and their motivations.

To get to know the biblical women, I think we can use the same tools that we might use if we were on a long plane ride. Seated next to a woman and wanting to pass the time, we begin to ask questions. We begin to see into her life. We don't get the whole story, and we might make some assumptions about her that wouldn't prove to be true but it could still be a satisfying experience. Those same questioning tools are helpful when we are reading stories about women, living or dead. In each chapter, I have taken the opportunity to write the questions that came into my mind but I encourage you to ask questions of your own.

I hope that you will bring your Bible with you to your meetings because I also have provided many references that relate to the chapter stories. It's fun to read the details that provide the background of the stories and they help us to see these Old Testament women in their context and culture.

You might begin by asking me a question, like “What is a Moravian doing writing the Bible study for Women of the ELCA?” I am not a Lutheran, true, but we are kin! I became a Moravian when I was very young, attending a small church in our neighborhood in Madison, Wis. At an early age, I knew that I wanted to be a teacher, but God began to pull at me and I figured that I would go to the mission field and teach. At that point the Moravian Church did not ordain women, but my call to serve God became as strong

as my resolve to be a teacher. College gave me the opportunity to major in religion and education, and by that time, I had fallen in love with my high school sweetheart, Aden. Through some wondrous acts of God, we married, I taught school, my husband became a Moravian pastor, and I followed him into ministry.

I left for Moravian Seminary in Bethlehem, Pa., with three pre-school age children. Twelve years in ordained ministry in Indiana and California and a D.Min. degree from Claremont School of Theology in California prepared me for 15 years on the faculty and staff at Moravian Theological Seminary, the perfect place to live out a call to theology and education. Those two threads have been woven into my life in a powerful and profound way.

Who Are the Moravians?

I have spent my life in the Moravian Church, which is one of the oldest Protestant denominations, dating back to 1457 with followers of John Hus in Europe. Moravians first came to America in 1735, bringing with them a strong tradition of ecumenical work while settling in Bethlehem, Pa., and Winston-Salem, N.C., which are still centers of our church in North America.

Moravians are best known for their missionary work and their rich musical heritage. We believe that faith is not simply a list of statements about us or our church, but is based on relationship. Our relationship with Jesus Christ provides a basis for our relationships with each other.

Those relationships have shaped our polity with conferences made up of laity and clergy to govern us in geographical provinces. There are two provinces

in North America and more than 20 provinces in the world-wide unity.

We have three orders of ministry: deacon, presbyter, and bishop (the Moravian Church began ordaining women in the early 70s). Bishops are spiritual guides, intercessors for the church, and pastors to pastors, but they do not hold an administrative office by virtue of election as a bishop. I was elected a bishop of the Moravian Unity in 1998, the first woman to be chosen

in the 550 years of our history. There is no humble way to write that but it is part of my story. It is a privilege to continue to serve my Savior and the church in my retirement.

Writing has always been a passion of mine and for many years I wrote a column for a local newspaper. Those columns were collected into two books of essays and I have written a third book in my retirement.

The little essays and stories I write are ways for me to honor and remember the details of my life, the wonderful happenings of our family, some adventures from my travels, and the joy of living in a log cabin in the woods of Wisconsin. In that cabin, Aden is companion, woodcutter, snowplow, and excellent first-draft proofreader. 

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Kay Ward is a bishop in the Moravian Unity. In 1998 she was the first woman to be chosen bishop in the Moravian church's 550-year history. Ordained in 1979, she is a retired professor and administrator of Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, Pa. She has written three collections of essays and lives in a log cabin in central Wisconsin. Kay and her husband, Aden, have four children and three grandchildren. Her books are available at store.moravian.org.

